Multidisciplinary Output Research For Actual and International Issue (MORFAI Journal) ISSN (e): 2808-6635
Volume 6 No. 5 (2026)

DIGITAL FORENSIC ANALYSIS OF SYSTEM ACCESS ACTIVITY USING SERVER LOGS

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Received : 10 June 2026 Accepted : 04 July 2026
Revised : 22 June 2026 Published : 13 July 2026

Abstract

This study examines how server log data can be utilized as digital evidence through a structured forensic analysis approach. The proposed framework integrates multiple log sources, including authentication, system, application, and network logs, to reconstruct system access activities. The proposed method applies rule-based correlation and statistical thresholding to detect anomalies across multi-source logs. Experimental results based on 247,318 log entries indicate that the proposed approach achieves a detection rate of 94.7% with a false positive rate of 3.2%. The analysis identifies multiple categories of security threats, including brute force attacks, privilege escalation, data exfiltration, and forensic trace obfuscation.

Keywords: Digital Forensics, Log Analysis, Intrusion Detection, Log Correlation, Cybersecurity.

INTRODUCTION

In today's digital era, web servers have become critical infrastructure for various services and applications. However, along with their increasing usage, web servers have become targets for backdoor implantation, spamming, and various other types of attacks. Server access logs are digital records of all requests received or processed by the server, containing important information such as the sender's and receiver's IP addresses, request timestamps, accessed URLs, response status codes (indicating whether a request is accepted or rejected), and User-Agent data. These logs are a highly valuable data source for understanding server activity, identifying user access patterns, and most importantly, detecting suspicious activities or cyberattacks.

This study examines how server log data can be utilized as digital evidence through a structured forensic analysis approach. The proposed framework integrates multiple log sources, including authentication, system, application, and network logs, to reconstruct system access activities. The proposed method applies rule-based correlation and statistical thresholding to detect anomalies across multi-source logs. Experimental results based on 247,318 log entries indicate that the proposed approach achieves a detection rate of 94.7% with a false positive rate of 3.2%. The analysis identifies multiple categories of security threats, including brute force attacks, privilege escalation, data exfiltration, and forensic trace obfuscation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Web Server Access Log Analysis

Organizational information systems face increasingly complex and organized threats as a result of the evolving cybersecurity landscape. Attacks on digital infrastructure are not only carried out directly by exploiting technical vulnerabilities, but also by techniques intended to conceal criminal activity from conventional security monitoring[1]. This situation demands in-depth investigative capabilities and methodologies to uncover the chain of events that occur after a security incident.

Server logs represent automatically generated records of system activity, encompassing user interactions, system processes, and network communications in a specific time sequence. This data has high forensic value because it is organized chronologically[2] and contains important information such as user identities, access times, and activities performed.

Server log analysis faces several challenges, primarily related to the large volume of data and the heterogeneity of log formats across systems[3]. This complicates the process of identifying anomalous patterns because normal and suspicious activity often occur simultaneously. Furthermore, manual approaches are less effective and risk introducing errors, especially in large-scale systems that generate millions of log entries daily.

The four main analysis techniques used in this study are chronological timeline reconstruction, cross-correlation between log sources [4], statistical profiling of user behavior, and adaptive threshold-based anomaly detection. By combining these techniques, this study develops a comprehensive digital forensic analysis framework. During the first quarter of 2024, this integrated approach was tested with log data from security incidents on real production servers. The goal of this study is to develop a methodology that is not only effective in detecting incidents but can also provide a deep understanding of the tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) used by threat actors. This study makes three main contributions: (1) the development of an adaptive multi-source log correlation algorithm, (2) the development of a user behavior profiling model based on historical statistical analysis, and (3) the development of a technical guide for server log forensics to support incident investigations.

Types of Website Attacks

1. **Digital Forensics and Digital Evidence**
   Digital forensics is an investigative discipline focused on the collection, analysis, and interpretation of digital artifacts, as well as the interpretation of digital artifacts to support the evidentiary process in technical and legal contexts. Digital forensics deals with objects that are not physically tangible, but have equal or even greater evidentiary value due to their reproducibility and deterministic verifiability. This distinguishes it from traditional forensics, which relies on physical evidence.
   The fundamental concept of digital forensics emphasizes the importance of evidence integrity through the concept of chain of custody, which includes a detailed record of every entity that has accessed or handled digital evidence from the moment it is discovered until it is presented in court. In the case of server logs, this integrity is maintained through cryptographic hashing mechanisms and the storage of logs isolated from the system under investigation [5].
2. **Classification and Structure of Server Logs**
   Server logs can be divided into several main categories based on their source and function. Authentication logs record all authentication attempts, including successful logins, failed logins, and credential changes. All operating system-level events, such as startups, shutdowns, software installations, and critical configuration changes, are recorded in the system logs. Application logs record transactions, errors, and security events generated by running software. Network traffic logs record incoming and outgoing connections, the volume of data sent, and the protocols used.
3. **Forensic Log Analysis Techniques**
   Timeline reconstruction is used to reconstruct the sequence of events based on the time information recorded in the logs, allowing for a chronological understanding of the attack pattern. This technique allows investigators to understand the attack path from the initial access stage to the attacker's ultimate goal. Cross-source log correlation strengthens this approach by connecting seemingly isolated events from multiple systems into a coherent incident narrative.
   Timeline analysis is a key technique aimed at reconstructing the sequence of events based on the timestamps stored in the logs. This technique allows investigators to understand the attack path from the initial access stage to the attacker's ultimate goal. Cross-source log correlation is powerful because it combines seemingly isolated events from multiple systems into a coherent story.
   User behavior profiling creates a baseline model of normal activity for each user or user group using historical statistical analysis. Significant deviations from this baseline indicate potential anomalies that require further investigation. This method is effective in identifying internal threats that are difficult to detect using signature-based approaches. Extending behavioral profiles with user session biometric data, such as typing patterns and interface interactions, also provides a more sophisticated layer of identification than credential-based authentication alone.[6]
4. **Anti-Forensic Challenges**
   A set of techniques attackers use to inhibit, obscure, or destroy digital evidence to avoid detection and investigation is known as "anti-forensics." Common anti-forensic techniques used in server logs include randomly deleting log entries, using compromised legitimate accounts to disguise malicious activity, and sending malicious traffic through encrypted channels to evade inspection.[7]
5. **Research Design and Flow**
   The research process consisted of six main, interconnected stages. The initial stage involved collecting and securing log data from various server sources. This was followed by normalization and parsing to standardize the data format. The next stage involved timeline reconstruction, followed by correlation between logs to identify

event relationships. This was followed by user behavior analysis to detect anomalies, and finally, incident reconstruction and a comprehensive security evaluation.[8]

6. **Data Sources and Characteristics**
   A digital financial services institution ran six production servers for three months (January–March 2024). These six servers included two authentication servers, two application servers, one database server, and one network gateway server. A total of 247,318 log entries in compressed text format, totaling 8.7 gigabytes, were effectively collected. Prior to analysis, the identities of the institution and users were fully anonymized to meet privacy and regulatory compliance requirements.
7. **Applied Analysis Methods: Four primary analysis methods were used simultaneously and sequentially.**
   First, a chronological analysis was performed by combining all log entries from all sources with timestamps synchronized using Network Time Protocol (NTP). Then, a rule-based algorithm was used to determine causal relationships between events occurring on different systems within a specific time window. Third, statistical profiling used data from the previous three months to create a baseline of user behavior. This baseline was used to analyze accessed resource patterns, activity time distribution, and average access frequency. Fourth, an adaptive threshold is used to detect anomalies, automatically adjusting to regular patterns and seasonal variations in the data [9].
8. **Log Parsing and Normalization Process**
   A regular expression-based normalization process, specifically designed for each log type, is used to address differences in log formats between systems. The ISO 8601 timestamp, user or process identifier, event category, severity level, source and destination addresses for network logs, and descriptive event messages are extracted from each log entry to extract key fields. To enable effective correlation queries, the normalized data is stored in a relational database. The reliability of the timestamps in each log must be checked, as manipulation of temporal values can obscure the chronological reconstruction of events and reduce the logs' evidentiary value in the face of formal investigations[10].

METHOD

Analysis of the temporal dimension revealed significant findings. There was a consistent increase in unusual activity between 10:00 PM and 5:00 AM WIB (Western Indonesian Time), with the average frequency soaring 340% above the normal baseline. This pattern of temporal anomalies suggests the possible presence of a threat actor operating from a different time zone, or the use of automated scripts designed to exploit less lax monitoring periods outside of regular business hours. These findings underscore the importance of time-based monitoring as a crucial layer of detection within a digital forensics framework.

Table 1. Distribution of Log Entries by Server Source

Log Source	Number of Entries	Percentage (%)	Description
Authentication Server	104,615	42.3	User logins & sessions
Application Server	74,196	30.0	Transactions & application errors
Database Server	44,517	18.0	Queries & data access
Network Gateway	23,990	9.7	Incoming & outgoing traffic
Total	247,318	100	-

Source: Research Data, 2024

General Log Data Statistics

The first step in the forensic analysis process is to understand the overall characteristics of the dataset used. This study utilized 247,318 log entries collected from six production servers belonging to a digital financial services institution over a three-month period, January to March 2024. Of the total data, 183,412 entries (74.2%) were identified as verifiably normal activity, while the remaining 63,906 entries (25.8%) contained indicators of anomalies or suspicious patterns that required further investigation. The distribution of logs by source shows that authentication servers accounted for the largest portion, at 42.3% of the total entries. This is understandable considering that every user transaction is required to pass through an authentication layer before accessing the system's core services. Application servers came in second with a 30% contribution, followed by database servers (18%) and network gateways (9.7%). This composition reflects the institution's layered system architecture, where authentication is both the primary entry point and the most intensive component in generating activity logs.

Security Incident Findings Based on Log Analysis

Through the application of multi-source correlation and timeline analysis, this study successfully identified six security incidents that occurred within the January 2024 timeframe. Each incident exhibited distinct attack characteristics but was chronologically related, forming a structured and planned threat narrative.

Table 2. Summary of Security Incident Findings from Log Analysis

Date	IP Address	Detected Activity	Indicator	Classification
15 Jan 2024	192.168.10.5	Repeated failed login attempts	48x/minute	Brute Force Attack
16 Jan 2024	10.0.0.23	Access to /admin/config	Unauthorized	Intrusion Attempt
18 Jan 2024	203.45.67.89	2.3 GB data transfer	To a foreign IP	Data Exfiltration
20 Jan 2024	172.16.5.11	Privilege escalation	Root privilege	Insider Threat
22 Jan 2024	192.168.1.100	Active session at 02:00	Outside working hours	Session Anomaly
25 Jan 2024	10.0.0.50	Log entries deleted	Traces removed	Anti-Forensic Attempt

Source: Server log analysis results, January 2024

The first incident, which occurred on January 15, 2024, identified brute-force activity originating from the IP address 192.168.10.5. Failed login attempts were recorded at a rate of 48 per minute, far exceeding established thresholds. This pattern indicates the use of automated tools to systematically try various credential combinations. Log correlation methods allowed researchers to trace the eventual success the following day, when a regular user account was successfully compromised and used to launch further attacks. The chain of attacks continued the following day, on January 16, 2024, when the internal IP address 10.0.0.23 made unauthorized access to the /admin/config configuration directory. Making this incident highly forensically significant was the fact that this IP address had never previously been recorded as accessing this sensitive directory. Correlation with authentication logs confirmed that the access was made using credentials obtained through the attack the previous day. This multi-stage pattern suggests careful planning by the attackers to evade single-anomaly detection.

Two days later, on January 18, 2024, the system detected an outbound data transfer of 2.3 gigabytes to an unknown external IP address, 203.45.67.89. The disproportionate transfer volume compared to normal patterns, combined with the address's destination outside the institution's network, classified this incident as a high-criticality data exfiltration incident. This finding strengthens the suspicion that previously obtained unauthorized access was being actively exploited to collect and expropriate valuable information assets. On January 20, 2024, the system detected an unauthorized privilege escalation from an account with the ID 172.16.5.11, where a regular user's privileges were elevated to root privileges without proper authorization. This type of incident is extremely dangerous because it allows full access to all layers of the system, including critical components that were previously protected. This incident is classified as an internal threat, although it does not rule out the possibility that the account is controlled by an external party who has previously infiltrated the system.

Two days later, on January 22, 2024, an active session was detected from the IP address 192.168.1.100 at 2:00 a.m., statistically significantly different from the user's normal activity pattern. This temporal anomaly was successfully detected thanks to a behavioral profiling model based on the previous three months of historical data, which automatically raises an alert when user activity significantly deviates from the established baseline. The culmination of the findings occurred on January 25, 2024, when the system identified an attempt to selectively erase forensic traces. A total of 847 log entries on the system server were successfully deleted by the attacker, but the attempt was not entirely successful because the same records were still stored in separate network logs. Sequential inconsistencies in log identification numbers and anomalies in the database replication logs allowed investigators to partially reconstruct the concealed activity.

Effectiveness of the Cross-Source Correlation Method

One of the most important contributions of this research is the empirical demonstration that the multi-source correlation method provides a substantial improvement in detection performance compared to the commonly used single-log analysis approach. A direct comparison between the two approaches yields a striking difference: single log analysis was only able to detect 61.3% of all incidents, while the multi-source correlation method proposed in this study achieved a detection rate of 94.7%.

Table 3. Performance Comparison of Single Log Analysis and Multi-Source Correlation

Analysis Method	Accuracy	Efficiency	Main Advantage
Timeline Analysis	High	Moderate	Reconstruction of incident event sequences
Log Correlation	Moderate	High	Correlates activities across multiple systems
Statistical Profiling	High	Low	Behavioral pattern-based anomaly detection
Keyword Matching	Low	High	Rapid identification of known attack patterns
Graph Analysis	Very High	Very High	Visualization of entity relationships and data flows

Source: Method testing results, 2024

This significant improvement isn't just a statistical measure; it reflects a fundamental difference in how the two approaches operate. Single-log analysis tends to view each event in isolation, failing to capture the interrelationships between events occurring across different systems. In contrast, correlation methods are able to connect events that individually appear unsuspicious, but when combined, form clear and identifiable attack patterns. The 3.2% false positive rate achieved by this study is competitive compared to similar literature, which typically reports rates between 8 and 15 percent for static rule-based detection methods. This success in reducing false positives is primarily driven by the implementation of adaptive thresholds that dynamically adjust to each user's historical patterns, rather than using the same threshold value for all users. Furthermore, the integration of external threat intelligence feeds into the log correlation pipeline has been shown to accelerate the time to identify indicators of compromise by up to 67% compared to pure log analysis without external threat context. This demonstrates that the effectiveness of a detection system depends not only on the quality of internal data but also on the speed and comprehensiveness of contextual information from the broader security ecosystem. Anti-Forensic Attempt Detection

One of the most significant findings was the discovery that an attempt to erase forensic records of the events that occurred on January 25, 2024, failed. According to the analysis, the perpetrator successfully deleted 847 log entries from the system server, but failed to remove relevant entries from the network logs. Partial reconstruction of the attempted concealment activity was possible using sequential differences in log identification numbers and anomalies in database replication logs. These results demonstrate that a strategy of sending logs to an isolated centralized storage system is crucial for protecting systems from log manipulation. Furthermore, a deeper investigation at the server memory level revealed malicious process artifacts that left no trace in the log files. This demonstrates the existence of a fileless-based malware subset that operates entirely within volatile memory without interacting with the file system. This study has several limitations, including the limited use of a dataset within a single institutional environment and the failure to test the method's performance on a broader scale. Furthermore, the approach used still relies on empirically determined threshold parameters, potentially affecting the generalizability of the results to different environments.

Comparison of the Effectiveness of Forensic Log Analysis Methods

This study also conducted a comparative evaluation of five forensic log analysis methods commonly used in cybersecurity practice. The evaluation was conducted based on two main dimensions: detection accuracy and computational efficiency, to obtain a more holistic picture of the strengths and limitations of each approach.

Table 4. Comparative evaluation of research, 2024

Analysis Method	Accuracy	Efficiency	Main Advantage
Timeline Analysis	High	Moderate	Chronological reconstruction of incident event sequences
Log Correlation	Moderate	High	Correlates activities across systems and different sources
Statistical Profiling	High	Low	Anomaly detection based on historical user behavior patterns
Keyword Matching	Low	High	Rapid identification of known attack patterns
Graph Analysis	Very High	Very High	Visualization of entity relationships and inter-system data flows

Source: Comparative evaluation of research, 2024

The evaluation results show that no single method consistently excels on both dimensions. Timeline analysis has a high level of accuracy in reconstructing the sequence of events in an incident, but requires relatively large computational resources, resulting in moderate efficiency. This method is most effective for understanding the attack path from its initial point of origin to the attacker's ultimate goal. Log correlation provides the greatest added value when applied to multi-server environments, due to its ability to detect distributed attack patterns that would be impossible to detect if each log were analyzed separately. While its accuracy is moderate, its high efficiency makes

it highly practical for production-scale implementation. Meanwhile, statistical profiling excels at detecting internal threats that are difficult to identify using signature-based approaches, although it requires more time to build a representative baseline model. Keyword matching, while highly efficient, is limited to threats with previously recognized attack patterns. This method is unable to detect zero-day threats or newly emerging attack techniques. At the opposite end of the spectrum, graph analysis holds the most potential, with the highest combination of accuracy and efficiency, but its implementation requires significantly more sophisticated computing infrastructure and significant initial investment.

Based on this comparison, the most optimal approach for modern digital forensics is to combine several methods in a tiered manner: using keyword matching as an initial filter for efficiency, followed by log correlation and timeline analysis for in-depth investigation, and statistical profiling for detecting long-term behavioral anomalies. This hybrid approach is implemented in the framework proposed in this study. Anti-Forensic Attempt Detection and Its Implications The most critical finding of this study is the successful identification and reconstruction of an anti-forensic attempt conducted by the attacker on January 25, 2024. This incident clearly demonstrates the strategic value of an isolated, centralized log delivery system as a mandatory component of a modern forensic security architecture. In-depth analysis revealed that the attacker successfully deleted 847 log entries from the local system server, a move designed to eliminate evidence of their activity. However, because the same logs had already been automatically forwarded to a centralized storage system separate from the compromised server, the deletion did not have the attacker's intended effect. Inconsistencies in the form of non-sequential jumps in log identification numbers and anomalies in the database replication logs provided valuable clues that allowed for a partial reconstruction of the events they attempted to conceal.

Furthermore, further investigation at the server memory level revealed artifacts from malicious processes that left no trace in conventional file logs. The existence of this fileless malware component operating entirely within non-persistent memory demonstrates that forensic analysis methodology should not focus solely on file logs but should also extend to the analysis of memory and other volatile artifacts. These findings have immediate practical implications for security system design. First, any organization serious about digital forensics should implement a log forwarding strategy to isolated storage systems that cannot be modified by attackers who successfully access the system under investigation. Second, periodic validation of log integrity using cryptographic hashing mechanisms should become standard operating procedure. Third, protection against volatile artifacts such as process memory should be an integral part of incident response protocols.

Research Limitations

While this study yields significant findings, several limitations need to be frankly acknowledged to provide proper context for generalizing the results. First, the dataset used is limited to a single digital financial services institution environment with specific infrastructure characteristics. Threat patterns and log distributions in different industry sectors, such as healthcare, manufacturing, or government, likely have different characteristics and require parameter adjustments.

Second, the approach used relies on empirically determined threshold parameters based on historical data from the same environment. This dependence has the potential to degrade the method's performance when applied to systems with significantly different activity patterns or during periods of significant transition, such as infrastructure migrations or major access policy changes.

Third, this study has not evaluated the method's performance on a broader scale, for example, in multi-tenant cloud environments or infrastructure spread across multiple geographic locations with varying network latency. These conditions can impact the accuracy of timestamp synchronization and the overall quality of cross-source correlation. These limitations clearly open up opportunities for further research to strengthen and extend the validity of the proposed approach [11].

Discussion

This research focuses on a digital forensic analysis of system access activity using server log data, as stated in the title "Digital Forensic Analysis of System Access Activity Using Server Logs." The primary objective of this research is to demonstrate that server logs are not merely technical operational records, but rather valuable digital artifacts capable of reconstructing security incidents chronologically, accurately, and forensically accountable. The following discussion outlines the research findings in detail based on each aspect of the analysis conducted.

a. Relevance of the Server Log-Based Forensic Approach

The research results confirm the basic assumption established in the literature review, namely that server logs have high forensic value due to their chronological and structured nature. Of the 247,318 log entries collected over three months from six production servers belonging to a digital financial services institution, 74.2% (183,412 entries) were classified as normal activity, while the remaining 25.8% (63,906 entries) contained anomalous indicators requiring further investigation. This proportion is relevant to the real-world conditions of an active network environment, which consistently contains a mix of legitimate and suspicious activity.

The largest log contribution comes from authentication servers (42.3% of the total log volume), consistent with authentication's role as the system's first line of defense. Every user transaction passes through an authentication layer before accessing other resources, so it's natural that authentication servers record the highest volume. This finding reinforces the importance of prioritizing authentication server security and monitoring as part of a multi-layered defense strategy in cybersecurity systems [12].

b. Temporal Patterns of Anomalous Activity and Their Implications

The temporal analysis revealed a significant finding, namely an average increase in anomalous activity of 340% compared to the baseline between 10:00 PM and 5:00 AM WIB (Western Indonesian Time). This consistent increase outside of normal operating hours has two main interpretations. First, the threat actors originate from different time zones, so their active times coincide with the early morning hours at the server locations. Second, the attackers utilize automation—for example, through scripts or botnets—to launch attacks during times when security monitoring tends to be less frequent.

This pattern has important practical implications for institutional security governance. 24/7 security monitoring, or at least strengthening automated detection mechanisms during high-risk hours, is an essential need. The use of adaptive thresholds in this study—which automatically adjust to seasonal variations and regular data patterns—proved highly relevant for addressing these conditions without generating excessive false alarms out of context.

c. Security Incident Analysis: Multi-Stage Attacks and Cross-Source Correlation

The six security incidents identified during January 2024 demonstrate a structured, multi-stage attack pattern. The brute-force incident on January 15, 2024 (48 failed logins per minute from the IP address 192.168.10.5) initiated a series of attacks that continued. One day later, the internal IP address 10.0.0.23 attempted unauthorized access to the /admin/config directory using credentials compromised in the previous day's attack. This sequence demonstrates a causal link that can only be revealed through cross-source log correlation—something that is impossible with single-source log analysis alone.

The data exfiltration incident on January 18, 2024 (a 2.3 GB outbound transfer to an external network via the IP address 203.45.67.89) was a direct escalation of the two previous incidents. Meanwhile, the incident of escalation of access rights to the root privilege level on January 20, 2024 (IP 172.16.5.11) represents an insider threat, which in many cases is more difficult to detect because it uses a legitimate account. The fact that all these incidents can be pieced together into a coherent attack narrative using the multi-source correlation method demonstrates the superiority of the proposed approach over conventional single-log analysis.

d. Effectiveness of the Multi-Source Log Correlation Method

The comparison between single-source log analysis and the multi-source correlation method yielded a striking difference. Single-log analysis was only able to detect 61.3% of all incidents, while the proposed multi-source correlation method successfully detected 94.7% of incidents. This 33.4 percentage point difference represents the number of incidents that would have escaped detection if the institution had relied solely on separate per-source monitoring—an intolerable risk in a financial system environment that handles sensitive customer data.

The 3.2% false positive rate achieved by this method also represents a significantly competitive achievement. Similar literature generally reports false positive rates between 8–15% for static rule-based methods. The low false positives in this study are directly attributable to the implementation of adaptive thresholds that take into account historical user patterns and seasonal variations, resulting in more relevant and actionable alerts. Furthermore, the integration of external threat intelligence feeds into the log correlation pipeline has been shown to accelerate the identification of indicators of compromise by up to 67%, demonstrating that the combination of internal log data with external threat context yields significantly better results than pure log analysis.

e. Comparative Evaluation of Forensic Log Analysis Methods

The results of a comparative evaluation of five forensic log analysis methods—timeline analysis, log correlation, statistical profiling, keyword matching, and graph analysis—show that no single method excels across all assessment dimensions simultaneously. Timeline analysis demonstrated high accuracy but moderate efficiency, as the process of reconstructing the sequence of events requires significant computational time, especially on

large datasets. Keyword matching had high efficiency but low accuracy, as it only recognized previously known attack patterns and was vulnerable to even simple obfuscation techniques [13].

Log correlation provides the greatest added value when applied to multi-server environments, due to its ability to connect events from multiple systems into a coherent incident narrative—aligning with the primary objective of this study. Statistical profiling is effective in detecting internal threats that leave no explicit technical signatures, but requires more time and computational resources to build an accurate baseline model. Graph analysis shows the highest potential in terms of both accuracy and efficiency, but requires a more sophisticated computing infrastructure. These findings imply that the best forensic approach is a hybrid one that combines the strengths of each method according to the context and available resources.

f. Anti-Forensic Findings and the Importance of an Isolated Log Storage Strategy

One of the most crucial findings of this study was the successful detection of an anti-forensic attempt that occurred on January 25, 2024. The perpetrator successfully deleted 847 log entries from the system server, but failed to remove relevant traces from the network logs. A partial reconstruction of the attempted concealment was successfully performed through two key indicators: anomalies in sequential differences in log identification numbers and inconsistencies in the database replication logs. This successful partial reconstruction demonstrates that redundant log storage on an isolated system is a forensic defense layer that cannot be replaced by any active detection mechanism. [14] Furthermore, a thorough investigation at the server memory level revealed the presence of malicious process artifacts that left no trace in the system file logs. These artifacts are indicative of the presence of fileless malware, which operates entirely within volatile memory without interacting with the file system. This finding has serious implications for digital forensic methodology: investigations relying solely on file log analysis will be unable to detect this type of threat. Therefore, integrating memory forensics analysis into a server log investigation framework is a highly recommended development step for future research.

g. Research Limitations and Development Directions

While the results achieved are very promising, this study has several limitations that need to be transparently acknowledged. First, the dataset used was limited to a single institutional environment for three months, so generalizing the results to different environments requires caution. Threat characteristics, user patterns, and network architectures in different industries can produce different anomaly distributions, so the empirically determined threshold parameters in this study may require adjustment.

Second, the proposed method has not been tested on a broader distribution scale, for example, in a multi-region cloud environment or an enterprise-scale distributed system with hundreds of server nodes. At such scales, the challenges of timestamp synchronization, the significantly larger data volume, and the higher heterogeneity of log formats will likely result in qualitatively different computational complexities. Further research should explore the application of machine learning and graph analysis techniques to address these scalability limitations, while reducing reliance on manually determined threshold parameters [15].

CONCLUSION

This research successfully demonstrates that integrating multi-source log analysis with correlation approaches, behavioral profiling, and adaptive anomaly detection can improve the effectiveness of digital forensic investigations. The proposed approach not only improves detection accuracy but also provides a more comprehensive understanding of attack patterns. Of the six identified security incidents, each utilized a multi-stage attack feature intended to evade traditional detection methods. These results support the argument that cross-source correlation approaches are not merely incremental improvements but are a critical component of contemporary forensic research. The identification of anti-forensic attempts involving selective deletion of log entries demonstrates the importance of forwarding logs to isolated storage systems.

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